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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000947

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM AM

SUBJECT: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? THE ARMENIAN BODY POLITIC STALLED FOR THE MOMENT

REFS: A) YEREVAN 880 B) YEREVAN 893 C) YEREVAN 901

¶11. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶12. (SBU) Now that the dust has settled, the government has released most opposition activists, and subsequent rallies have proceeded without incident, the lack of genuine opposition unity or a realistic game plan is becoming more apparent. By insisting that President Kocharian resign and calling for a referendum for which there is no legal basis (septel) the opposition has left itself little political space in which to maneuver. End Summary.

RECENT RALLIES MODEST, MOSTLY CALM

¶13. (SBU) Approximately 3000 opposition supporters demonstrated at 6:00 p.m. on April 16, with the rally proceeding for ninety minutes in steady rain, with opposition leaders Stepan Demirchian, Artashes Geghamian and Aram Sargsyan urging their supporters to keep up the pressure on President Kocharian, and condemning the police actions against the opposition during the week. Opposition supporters had planned to hold the unauthorized rally in Opera Square, but were turned away by police who had scheduled a concert in the Opera to mark National Police Day. The demonstrators then marched on the sidewalk to the nearby park in front of the National Manuscript Museum without incident. Approximately 30 police (wearing regular uniforms, not riot gear) kept the demonstrators from spilling into the street. One police officer told us that he had been instructed by his superiors to not carry his baton or any other weapon. The rally concluded at approximately 8:00 p.m., and the demonstrators dispersed without incident.

¶14. (SBU) The rally April 21 attracted some 5000 to 7000 supporters, who listened to several hours of speeches and then proceeded to march in a roughly one-mile circuit around downtown Yerevan. Although the demonstrators seriously impeded traffic during their march in the streets officials did not interfere in any way: we even observed the police stopping traffic so the demonstrators could pass safely through intersections. By the end of the march, fewer than 1000 protestors remained, with the evening ending peacefully (the march concluded at slightly after 9:30 p.m. local time).

OPPOSITION SPLIT ON THE NEXT STEPS

¶15. (SBU) The opposition is split on whether or not to carry through on its call for a rally and march on April 24, Armenian Genocide Memorial Day. Sources within the opposition tell us that Stepan Demirchian and Vazgen Manukian oppose the plan to march in force past the Presidential Palace to the Genocide Memorial, believing that any attempt to politicize the memorial would backfire. According to these same opposition staffers, Aram Sargsian and Artashes Geghamian, on the other hand, are anxious to provoke a confrontation with the authorities and are pushing hard to organize a highly public rally and march. We believe that, were the opposition to attempt to use Armenia's most solemn holiday for political gain, the potential for increased tensions and possible violence could be significant.

COMMENT: NO PLAN FOR WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

16. (SBU) We believe that the opposition, never genuinely unified, is already starting to show its ideological cracks. With Demirchian and Manukian lining up against their colleagues more inclined to confrontation, Sargsian and Geghamian, we see little evidence of agreement even on tactical issues.
Kocharian won't need to pack his bags just yet.
ORDWAY